

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 126

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 156

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 126—Relative to the Honorable Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins.

[Filed with Secretary of State September 19, 2008.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

ACR 126, Dymally. Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins.

This measure would commend and recognize the late Honorable Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins for his great accomplishments and his contributions to this state and our country as both a former Member of this Assembly and as a United States Representative in Congress and would declare that the second Monday of September of each year shall be Gus Hawkins Day in California.

WHEREAS, The Honorable Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins was a soft-spoken, articulate man whose public service as a Member of the Assembly and as a United States Representative in Congress spanned the years from 1935 to 1991, making him the longest serving Member of the Assembly, 28 years, and the first African American to serve in Congress from this state; and

WHEREAS, In the Assembly and as the first African American United States Representative in Congress from the western part of the country, Augustus Hawkins was elected from districts populated by African Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, and Caucasian Americans, and he devoted his energy to issues of civil rights, employment, education, child care, housing, slum clearance, and age discrimination; and

WHEREAS, Augustus Hawkins was the son of Nyanza Hawkins, a pharmacist, and Hattie Freeman Hawkins, and was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, on August 31, 1907; Augustus, the youngest of five children, was 10 when his father sold his business and moved the family to Los Angeles; he worked in a drug store and in the post office during his high school years, and as a janitor in the girls' gymnasium when he studied at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) for a B.A. degree in economics, which he earned in 1931; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Hawkins' original intention was to enter graduate school at UCLA to prepare for a career in civil engineering, but the lack of sufficient financial support made it more attractive to take classes in the Institute of Government of the University of Southern California while he worked in the real estate business he established with his brother, Edward; before long, his increasing interest in the plight of minorities in his area led to political ventures in support of Upton Sinclair's unsuccessful campaign for Governor

of California and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's candidacy that ended with election to his first term as President of the United States in 1932; and

WHEREAS, In 1935, Mr. Hawkins won a seat in the Assembly by defeating another African American, Frederick Roberts, a longtime Assembly Member; Hawkins' tenure stretched into more than a quarter of a century—from 1935 to 1962—and he served an identical longevity in the United States House of Representatives; and

WHEREAS, As an Assembly Member, Mr. Hawkins chaired the powerful Assembly Committee on Rules and was an influential figure in Sacramento, sponsoring laws that reflected his concern about the status of the ethnic minorities in his district and working people in the state; although he initiated or coauthored more than 100 other laws, he is best remembered in the state for the five years of struggle leading to the passage of the California Fair Employment Practices Act, which was signed in 1959; Mr. Hawkins used his willingness to work hard and his innate capabilities to chair powerful Assembly committees that dealt with unemployment, labor and capital, rules, and public utilities; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Hawkins, with Speaker of the Assembly Jesse Unruh, was responsible for upgrading both the services for and the role of Members of the Assembly in his capacity as Chair of the Assembly Committee on Rules; and

WHEREAS, When Mr. Hawkins went from the Assembly to the House of Representatives in 1963, he was the spokesman for the same constituency he had in the state government of California, and he brought to Washington, D.C., his valuable legislative experience; Mr. Hawkins hoped that he could bring about more meaningful and more widespread changes at the federal level than in the state house; in April of 1970, Mr. Hawkins was cosponsor of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which improved the quality of education for children from lower income families and in his early years in the House of Representatives, he helped to establish the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and

WHEREAS, When Mr. Hawkins chaired the powerful House Committee on Education and Labor, his charge was to monitor existing programs and provide legislation and funding for their operation at a time of severe budget cuts proposed by the Reagan administration; he opposed President Reagan's cuts in social programs, such as financial aid to students, grants to educational institutions, unemployment insurance, funds for school lunches, and job training; Mr. Hawkins also chaired the Committee on House Administration during the 97th and 98th Congresses, and his greatest success in Congress was the passage of the Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978, also known as the Humphrey-Hawkins Act; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Hawkins also succeeded in restoring an honorable discharge for the entire 1st Battalion of the Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiment of the United States Army, 167 African American soldiers in all, after they were falsely accused of a public disturbance in Brownsville, Texas, in 1906, and throughout his years in Congress, Mr. Hawkins pointed to failures in

federal action; he emphasized that unemployment, lack of adequate education, and the sense of isolation among financially distressed people were the chief causes of disruptive behavior that affects the population as a whole; over and over he pleaded for tax reform and encouraged citizens to be involved in the workings of their government at the grassroots level; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Hawkins openly voiced dissatisfaction with military spending coupled with continued mistreatment of African American veterans returning from Vietnam; a survey he requested confirmed that of 523 higher level positions in the Pentagon, only three were held by African Americans, and not one was involved in decisionmaking; during the war in Vietnam, Mr. Hawkins and William R. Anderson, the Representative from Tennessee, by their protest to President Richard M. Nixon, caused an immediate correction of the inhumane treatment of civilians in a prison in South Vietnam; and

WHEREAS, In February 1986, Mr. Hawkins, then Chair of the Education and Labor Committee of the House of Representatives, called together a nationally representative group of African American educators and leaders of organizations interested in the welfare of African American children, and charged them with the responsibility of developing a plan and procedure for improving the quality of education for African American youth. He insisted that the plan be guided by the correlates found in the “Effective” Schools research of noted African American educator, the late Dr. Ron Edmonds. The product of that effort was the establishment of the National Conference (now Council) on Educating Black Children (NCEBC); and

WHEREAS, When Congressman Hawkins announced his plans to retire in January of 1991, he did so anticipating passage of the civil rights legislation that was ultimately signed on November 21 of that year; this was a fitting reward for a man whose sole purpose in public life was to better conditions for people without the means or the knowledge to take action for themselves; in retirement, he lived in Washington, D.C., engaged in tasks that mirrored his tenure as an elected official; and

WHEREAS, With characteristic energy, Mr. Hawkins in retirement served as director of the Hawkins Family Memorial Foundation for Educational Research and Development, which he founded in 1969, and supported by Members of Congress and educational institutions, the foundation formulates and implements policies aimed at more effective education of young people in preparation for employment; this employment increases the chances for young adults to be more productive and free from the problems that beset large numbers of minority populations; and

WHEREAS, Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins, no longer bound to the demanding and often unpredictable schedules in state and federal government, maintained an active membership in the NAACP and the Masonic Lodge; the widespread esteem felt for the former United States Representative is shown by the honorary doctorates that have been conferred upon him by 12 universities in states all over the country; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Hawkins was succeeded in the California State Assembly by Mervyn M. Dymally, who subsequently joined him in Congress and served with him on the House Committee on Education and Labor; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Hawkins died on November 10, 2007; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California, the Senate thereof concurring, That the Legislature commends and recognizes the Honorable Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins for his great accomplishments and his contributions to this state and our country as both a former Member of this Assembly and as a United States Representative in Congress; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature declares that the second Monday of September of each year shall be Gus Hawkins Day in California and encourages all schools in California to teach about Mr. Hawkins and reflect on his legacy; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the family of the Honorable Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins and to the author for appropriate distribution.